

In America, there are always challenging issues facing the future of our country. The only choice we have in the matter is whether to tackle them or leave them for future generations. For the last few decades, many have unfortunately preferred to put political expedience over responsible governance and allow major issues to be decided by someone else. For too long Congress has ceded its legislative authority to the executive branch and to the courts.

But, Madam Speaker, article 1 of the Constitution says the buck stops right here. And this week, the House will do its duty by the Constitution and the American people and make our voices heard on two of the toughest challenges facing our Nation today.

First, we will take up the District of Columbia Personal Protection Act which would guarantee the second amendment rights of District residents. For years American citizens in Washington, D.C., have had their right to self-protection denied them, and it is time to set things right. Washington residents are American citizens and, therefore, deserve the same right to bear arms, to defend themselves, as much as anyone else. The homes of this city will be safer when its law-abiding citizens are on a equal footing with its violent criminals.

Second, we will take up the Marriage Protection Amendment which would reaffirm the definition of marriage as the union between one man and one woman. The marriage issue, like too many issues these days, is being forced upon the American people by judicial activists overstepping their authority. Congress must assert itself. The voice of the people must be heard.

It is our job to make the laws in this country. And as easy as life would be for us if the most controversial bill we had to vote on was to rename a post office, that is not what we were elected to do. We were elected to deliberate over difficult issues, to come down on one side or the other and to ultimately defend our decisions in open debate before the American people.

That is how the framers wanted it. And this week, Madam Speaker, that is how it is going to be.

#### BUYOUT AND FDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 20, 2004, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Madam Speaker, I have just had a number of farmers leave my office this morning, and they are not real sure they are going to be farming this year. So I rise today because tobacco farmers, growers and allotment holders desperately need a tobacco buyout, and they expect Congress to pass one before leaving in October.

Without a buyout, approximately half of North Carolina's tobacco grow-

ers could go out of business this year. A buyout means a difference between bankruptcy and solvency, between being forced out of business and retiring with dignity, and between surrendering everything to creditors or having a legacy to leave to the next generation.

A buyout would pump almost \$4 billion into rural North Carolina at a time when they are really hurting. This infusion of capital would launch our agriculture sector into a new era of growth and development and provide greater stability to those who wish to continue to farm.

Because the buyout is so critical to North Carolina's farm families and to the continued strength of North Carolina's agriculture sector, it is time for Congress to make the tough decisions necessary to ensure the buyout's success. Now, in the past several months, it has become increasingly clear that the ultimate success of a tobacco buyout is directly tied to the inclusion of FDA regulation.

Madam Speaker, tobacco growers do not want us to have a prolonged fight over FDA. That is what they have told me over and over again. They want a buyout today, and they are fully prepared to pay the price of FDA regulation to ensure and expedite the buyout package.

I have long opposed FDA regulation of tobacco, but let me state clearly, if inclusion of FDA regulation gets us to the goal of enacting buyout legislation before we leave town this year, so be it.

Madam Speaker, I know you are being asked by many people to separate FDA regulations from the buyout. They promise that a buyout can become law without FDA. Madam Speaker, I warn you here and now, if you choose that path and the buyout is defeated, either in the House or the Senate, for any reason, you and they will be responsible for that failure.

The Senate buyout/FDA amendment garnered an incredible 78 votes, more than enough to override a filibuster or overcome a veto. The Senate Republican leader and Senate Republican Whip have said FDA is needed for a buyout to become law, so have Republican Senators DOLE, DEWINE and MCCAIN. Today, we have seen one of the Senate conferees, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pension, Senator GREGG, will insist that FDA remain a part of the buyout package.

Madam Speaker, tobacco growers and allotment holders are at the end of their rope. Failure is not an option. Congress must pass the buyout without further delay, and it is time to make the tough choices necessary to get it done.

Madam Speaker, let us do right by our tobacco-farming families. Let us stop making promises and start delivering results. Let us get the buyout to our farmers and quota holders before the election this year. They deserve nothing less.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair cautions all Members against making improper references to Senators.

#### IRAQI ELECTIONS MUST GO FORWARD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 20, 2004, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Madam Speaker, a country was looking for free, democratic elections. Yet, a violent insurgency controlled about one-third of the nation's territory. Insurgents mined roads to prevent transportation and potential voters had to dodge sniper fire just to vote. Yet people by the hundreds of thousands risked their lives to have the opportunity a chance to vote, a chance for freedom.

For those that may not recognize this piece of history, the year is 1982, and the country is El Salvador, and 2 years later the people of that country had to risk the same peril to vote. This situation sounds familiar, does it not.

I doubt many can forget the horrible atrocities committed during the Civil War in El Salvador that claimed over 75,000 lives. The insurgents in that day were no less ruthless than those at the interim government that Afghanistan and Iraq are facing. Violent efforts were increased before and on the day of election to prevent the people of El Salvador from choosing their destiny. The reason was simple. Elections, as pointed out in a recent New York Times article, "suck the oxygen from a rebel army."

Interim Prime Minister Allawi knows this as well as Afghanistan President Karzai. Prime Minister Allawi was on this floor last week and stated emphatically that despite the naysayers in the media, and the supporters of Senator KERRY, Iraq will have free elections next year. Yet, not a day goes by that some pundit or some strategist talks about conditions in Iraq and says that the country is not ready for elections.

However, Madam Speaker, I think it would be worthwhile for those who say they are experts to listen to the Iraqi people. According to some Arab news media reports and Iraqi blogs, only a small portion of Iraq is under control of the insurgents. We are talking about a country that is roughly the size of California, and only a small portion remains vulnerable to the insurgencies.

Allawi is right to move forward with the elections. Iraqis are beyond fed up with these terrorist acts and may surprise many with their resilience in the face of these attacks.

Look at the Iraqi police and National Guard. Despite being persistent targets of these extremists, Iraqi citizens continue to risk their lives to sign up for